

(Matt. 10:16) - *“BEHOLD, I SEND YOU FORTH AS SHEEP IN THE MIDST OF WOLVES”* - The Lord is often set forth as the Shepherd of His sheep (His people). He is the *“good Shepherd”* Who died for them, putting away their sins, satisfying the justice of God, and establishing the righteousness by which God has justified them and from which He gives them spiritual life (John 10:11). He is the *“great Shepherd”* Who died and arose again accomplishing the complete salvation and preservation of all for whom He died and for whom He is advocate (Heb. 13:20-21). He is the *“chief Shepherd”* Who shall bring all for whom He died and arose unto glory forever and ever (1 Pet. 5:4). His sheep are His people, given to Him by the Father before the foundation of the world. All of their salvation was conditioned upon Christ alone as their Surety, Substitute, Redeemer, and Preserver.

Christ sent His disciples out into the world that was overrun by false preachers who are described as *“wolves.”* Some are described as *“wolves in sheep’s clothing”* (Matt. 7:15) as they attempt to disguise themselves as sheep. True sheep believe and preach the true Gospel of salvation by God’s free and sovereign grace in and by the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness alone. The wolves preach salvation in some way, at some stage, to some degree by the works and/or wills of men. The message of the sheep glorifies God in Christ alone (1 Cor. 1:29-31; Gal. 6:14; Php. 3:3). The message of the wolves always leaves sinful people some room to glory in themselves.

“BE YE THEREFORE WISE AS SERPENTS, AND HARMLESS AS DOVES” - Having been sent into a hostile world where people by nature hate the light of truth (John 3:19-20), it is imperative that the ministers of Christ strive to avoid confrontation and turmoil, not by compromising the Gospel, but by seeking wisdom from God in dealing with people and by seeking to keep the peace without compromise (Heb. 12:14). As Christ’s witnesses to a lost world, we will be persecuted and falsely accused by unbelievers when we expose their false hopes and evil deeds (works aimed at salvation). But we are to try to make certain that the message and not ourselves (our personalities and mannerisms) is offensive.

(Matt. 10:17-18) - Christ’s faithful witnesses must be on guard against men who would use any and all means to silence the message they despise. They will do this in the name of religion (cf. John 15:18–16:3). *“THE COUNCILS”* and *“THEIR SYNAGOGUES”* refer to their religious governing bodies and their worship centers where they promote their false gospel of salvation by the works and wills of men. They will even work with the civil authorities to try to outlaw the spread of the Gospel of Christ. *“FOR A TESTIMONY AGAINST THEM AND THE GENTILES”* - Their hatred of truth and their evil attempts to silence Christ’s witnesses will be a testimony against both unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. Paul wrote, *“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature”* (Gal. 6:14-15). Those who live by their works consider God’s people to be accursed, but we who know Christ know that if they live and die in their unbelief, it is they who are cursed.

(Matt. 10:19-20) - Knowing that they could be facing immanent danger would certainly cause them to be concerned (and maybe sinfully anxious) about what they would say in defense of themselves and their message when brought before high-ranking officials. But Christ tells them not to be concerned about this. He tells them that the Holy Spirit would give them the right words to say and, in reality, speak through them. We know that in these situations, our own words are always inadequate. And because of the remaining corruption and influences of sinful flesh, we are not above trying to water the message down so as to make it less

offensive and save ourselves from harm. Standing firm in the Gospel in the face of torture and death takes a mighty portion of God's power and grace, else we will fail. The kind of courage it takes is not natural to us, but it is of God Who saves and keeps us, and Who makes us bold in the truth.

(Matt. 10:21) - Christ's disciples will find that when it comes to standing firm in the truth against those who hate it, natural family ties will often be no barrier to that hatred and how it is expressed -

"BROTHER SHALL DELIVER UP THE BROTHER TO DEATH, AND THE FATHER THE CHILD: AND THE CHILDREN SHALL RISE UP AGAINST THEIR PARENTS, AND CAUSE THEM TO BE PUT TO DEATH."

The very first murder was Cain killing his brother, Abel, over the Gospel (1 John 3:11-13). When people are told that the works and experience they highly esteem as making them right with God are, in reality, an abomination to God, unless the Spirit of God convicts them of sin, righteousness, and judgment, they will respond in unbelief and hatred (Luke 16:15). We tell sinners that God requires a perfect righteousness that can only be found in the glorious Person and finished work of Christ. We tell them that there is NONE righteous, NONE good, NO, NOT ONE (Rom. 3:10-12). We tell them that to be ignorant of God's righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness by their works is evil (Rom. 9:31-10:3). We tell them that *"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth"* (Rom. 10:4), and anything less is sin. We tell them that all will be judged by God in righteousness *"by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead"* (Acts 17:31). We tell them to stand before God without Christ's righteousness imputed is damnation.

(Matt. 10:22) - ***"AND YE SHALL BE HATED OF ALL MEN FOR MY NAME'S SAKE"*** - This is the natural hatred that all unregenerate people hold for the truth that exposes them for what they are. This hatred may come in many forms and express itself in many ways (some more severe than others), but to reject the message of Christ and salvation by God's grace in and by Him is hatred of Him and His people (Matt. 6:24; 12:30). The true Gospel is opposed to every false hope that lies within every unbeliever. ***"BUT HE THAT ENDURETH TO THE END SHALL BE SAVED"*** - This endurance is that perseverance in the faith that comes from the grace, goodness, and power of God in Christ (Php. 1:6; 2:12-13). It is not by our power or goodness. Left to ourselves, we would not endure. Therefore, endurance is an EVIDENCE that God has saved us and is preserving us by His grace in Christ (John 10:27-30; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:5; Jude 24-25). Christ's sheep are saved and secure by His grace and power, and He will never let us apostatize (1 John 3:9). This suffering for Christ's sake, therefore, is a true blessing for God's people as it proves and evidences our spiritual and eternal union with Christ and of God's love for us as His dear children (John 15:18-16:3; Matt. 5:13-16; Php. 1:27-30; Heb. 12:1-8).

(Matt. 10:23-25) - Following Christ and preaching His Gospel will always bring persecution. When people reject the truth and seek to persecute us, we are to leave that place and take our message elsewhere. This applied to Christ's disciples preaching the Gospel in Israel. He told them that He would come to Israel in judgment before they finished going through all the cities in Israel. The true disciple cannot rise ***"ABOVE HIS MASTER,"*** nor can the ***"SERVANT"*** rise ***"ABOVE HIS LORD."*** When we follow, serve, and identify with Christ in His message of truth, as they hated and persecuted Him, unbelievers will hate and persecute us. If they accused Christ of being in league with the devil, they will also accuse His disciples of the same. The irony here is that, in reality, all who stand against Christ and His truth are the ones who are of the devil (2 Cor. 4:3-4; 1 John 3:10; 5:18-19).